



The original 17th-century farmhouse sits at the heart of a 140-acre organic farm. The process of building the new extension, designed by Meredith Bowles of Mole Architects (molearchitects.co.uk), was project-managed by Toby Smallpeice himself. 'We originally intended for the barrel roof to be made of brick rather than steel,' Bowles says, 'but the steel roof was easier to build and manage and less expensive. Building a brick vault roof on your first self-build might have been a step too far.' The old and new buildings are connected by a two-level glass link

The modern farmer is always being told to diversify, and Toby Smallpeice and Lisa O'Connor have certainly taken that advice to heart. Since buying Hawthbush Farm in Sussex in 2009 they have converted outbuildings for holiday let and introduced safari tents and shepherd's huts for summer glamping. They have also made the farm organic, raising heifers for a local dairyman and producing feed for livestock. At the heart of the whole operation sits their own farmhouse, shared with their son, Zac, seven, and daughter, Didi, five.

Smallpeice used to work in internet marketing in London; O'Connor was involved in marketing and PR in Brighton. After moving into their first farmhouse in Falmer, not far from Brighton, they caught the countryside fever, and when they spotted Hawthbush they saw an opportunity for both a new home and new careers.

'I had just left my job and was looking for something different,' Smallpeice says. 'We were happy in the old house but then I was sent a picture of Hawthbush by an estate agent and mentioned it to Lisa over supper one evening. The next day we got into the car to go and have a little bit of a nose around.'

'It was very ramshackle and bathed in this lovely late-afternoon light,' O'Connor adds. 'We fell in love with it.'

Hawthbush soon became home, work and building project. They decided to convert two buildings – originally animal sheds – into holiday lets and update and extend the 17th-century farmhouse at the same time. All three would be fed by a communal wood-chip boiler and served by the farm's own water borehole.

O'Connor found just the right architect to design a dramatic new extension to the farmhouse: Meredith Bowles of Mole Architects, much respected for projects such as Alain de Botton's Living Architecture initiative, which has created a network of landmark modern houses around the country. 'I'd seen a picture of one of Meredith's houses in a magazine and knew immediately that he would be right for Hawthbush,' O'Connor says. 'When we met I showed him a beautiful piece of pottery and I said this is your inspiration.'

Bowles's interpretation can be seen in the tall brick chimney of the new addition, which replaced a tired 1970s extension. It echoes the high neck of O'Connor's vase, whose rounded base is represented by the curved top half of the two-storey structure. On the ground floor is a large, open family space combining a kitchen, dining

ROOM TO GROW

A couple have dramatically extended their Sussex farmhouse – and their home-based business enterprises.

By **Dominic Bradbury.**

Photographs by **Simon Brown**



area, lounge and playroom arranged around a fire-place. An expanse of folding glass doors offers an easy, fluid sense of connection with the garden. Bright and airy, the extension offers a contrast to the low ceilings and more enclosed, cosy feel of the old farmhouse alongside. Upstairs there is space for a master bedroom with a view of the treetops nearby, giving it an almost treehouse quality.

'We saw a farm building being knocked down locally and asked if we could buy the salvaged bricks for the extension, so they are the same vintage as the house,' Smallpeice says. 'Meredith's preference was for steel for the roof, and we are very pleased with it. What's really nice is that it has a lightness to it and on a cloudy day the rounded grey roof just disappears against the sky.'

A two-level, glass-faced link subtly connects the

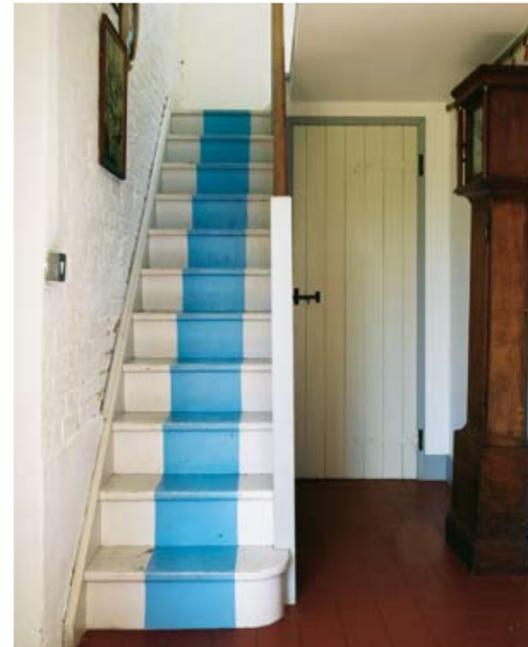


old and new buildings, allowing both parts of the house to read as distinct entities visually.

While the new extension is the hub of daily family life, the older portion of the building comes into its own in the evenings; the children sleep in two of its four upstairs rooms. For Smallpeice and O'Connor it is also the operations centre for the rapidly expanding Hawthbush business portfolio. There is a brand-new microbrewery, established by Smallpeice in one of the barns, and O'Connor has recently launched a range of facial products, christened Amly, using water from the spring, and organic herbs and plants grown on their land. This may be the country, but it is never sleepy at Hawthbush Farm.

hawthbushfarm.co.uk; gunbrewery.co.uk; amlybotanicals.co.uk

With its timber floors and ceilings the master bedroom has the feel of a ship's cabin or a treehouse



Top The master bedroom sits within the upper level of the new extension. With its timber floors and ceilings this space has the feel of a ship's cabin or a treehouse. **Centre left** The dining room is in the old part of the house, with its low ceilings, exposed beams, painted wooden floors and inglenook fireplace. **Above** The ground floor of the new extension is now the hub of family life. It holds the kitchen, a pantry, a dining area, a fireplace, a family relaxation space and a playroom, as well as offering easy connection to the back garden via the folding glass doors.

Top The sitting room in the original farmhouse with its open fire comes into its own in the evening and on winter weekends. The space was opened up with the removal of a partition wall; a new steel pillar helps to support the ceiling beams. The sofa by the window is from Ercol (ercol.com) with colourful cushions by Molly Mahon (mollymahon.com).

Above Toby Smallpeice, Lisa O'Connor and their children, Zac and Didi. The farm is also home to 25 young heifers, numerous chickens and Nettle the dog.